

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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R 241015Z MAY 77
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7348
INFO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY LONDON
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SUBJ: ELECTIONS: AN OVERVIEW

REF: (A) COLOMBO 1729; (B) COLOMBO A-37 (NOTAL); (C) COLOMBO
546 (NOTAL); (D) COLOMBO 1761 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: WITH THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE DISSOLUTION OF THE
NATIONAL STATE ASSEMBLY MAY 18 AND THE SCHEDULING OF THE GENERAL
ELECTION FOR JULY 21, THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN GETS UNDERWAY IN
EARNEST. THE MAIN CONTEST IS BETWEEN THE RULING SRI LANKA
FREEDOM PARTY (SLFP) LED BY PRIME MINISTER SIRIMAVO BANDARAN-
AIKE AND THE UNITED NATIONAL PARTY (UNP) OF J. R. JAYEWARDENE.
ON THE LEFT IS A COALITION SOCIALIST UNITED FRONT, COMPOSED OF
TROTSKYITES, MOSCOW-LINE COMMUNISTS, SO-CALLED "MAOISTS", AND
YOUNG RADICALS INVOLVED IN THE 1971 INSURGENCY. THE ONLY OTHER
MAJOR PARTY CONTESTING WILL BE THE TAMIL UNITED LIBERATION
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FRONT (TULF), WHICH IS EXPECTED TO WIN MOST OF THE SEATS IN
THE TAMIL-SPEAKING AREAS. A GENERALLY FAIR ELECTION IS ANTI-
CIPATED; HOWEVER, PARTISAN FEELINGS RUN VERY STRONG IN A NATION
WHERE POST-ELECTION PATRONAGE IS SOMETIMES THE ONLY HOPE OF
JOBLESS YOUTH. AFTER SEVEN YEARS IN THE POLITICAL WILDERNESS,
THE UNP IS PUBLICLY CONFIDENT THAT IT WILL RETURN TO POWER,
BARRING SOME SORT OF ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENT BETWEEN THE SLFP

AND THE LEFT, AS EXISTED IN 1970. A CLOSE ELECTION COULD MEAN A POST-ELECTION COALITION WITH THE LEFT OR TAMILS PARTICIPATING. ELECTION ISSUES WILL BE THE PERENNIAL ONES OF THE COST OF LIVING AND UNEMPLOYMENT, WHICH THE UNP WILL COMPLAIN HAVE BEEN EXACERBATED DURING THE LAST SEVEN YEARS. CORRUPTION AND NEPOTISM IN THE GOVERNMENT WILL ALSO BE ATTACKED. THE SLFP WILL RUN ON ITS IMPLEMENTATION OF LAND REFORM, PLANTATION NATIONALIZATION, AND AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEMES. FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES ARE NOT EXPECTED TO PLAY AN IMPORTANT PART IN THE CAMPAIGN, A VICTORY BY THE UNP WOULD NOT MEAN A SHARP BREAK IN FOREIGN POLICY, ALTHOUGH SOME IN THAT PARTY MAY BE ANTICIPATING CLOSER TIES WITH THE WEST AND THE U.S. END SUMMARY.

2. PRIME MINISTER SIRIMAVO BANDARANAIKE'S ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE DISSOLUTION OF THE NATIONAL STATE ASSEMBLY (NSA) PAVES THE WAY FOR THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN TO BEGIN IN EARNEST, ENDING AT THE POLLS ON JULY 21 (REF A). THE OPPOSITION UNITED NATIONAL PARTY (UNP) APPEARS CONFIDENT OF HAVING CONVINCED THE ELECTORATE THAT IT IS A REJUVENATED PARTY, READY UNDER ITS 71-YEAR OLD LEADER J. R. JAYEWARDENE TO LEAD THE COUNTRY AGAIN AFTER SEVEN YEARS OUT OF POWER. ITS HOPES ARE BUOYED BY THE FACT THAT THE SLFP WILL BE CONTESTING THE ELECTION WITHOUT ITS LEFTIST PARTNERS OF 1970 UNLESS PRIVATE TALKS BETWEEN THE GROUPS RESULT IN A NO-CONTEST ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENT OF SOME KIND. THOSE FORMER PARTNERS, THE TROTSKYITE LANKA SAMA SAMAJA PARTY (LSSP) AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY/MOSCOW WING (CP/M), HAVE FORMED THEIR OWN SOCIALIST UNITED FRONT (SUF) ALONG WITH FIVE DEFECTING M.P.'S FROM THE SLFP (OFTEN CALLED THE "MAOIST" WING) AND A MOTLEY COLLECTION OF RADICAL YOUTH LEFT OVER FROM THE 1971 LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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INSURGENCY (REF B). THE TRIANGULAR CONTESTS RESULTING FROM THE LEFTISTS' ANNOUNCED INTENTION TO RUN CANDIDATES IN ALMOST ALL NON-TAMIL ELECTORATES WILL MAKE THEM THE SPOILER, TO THE BENEFIT IN MOST PLACES OF THE UNP. THE OTHER MAJOR PARTY ON THE ELECTORAL SCENE IS THE TAMIL UNITED LIBERATION FRONT (TULF), WHICH IS EXPECTED TO WIN MOST OF THE 24 SEATS IT WILL CONTEST IN THE NORTHERN AND EASTERN PROVINCES WHERE TAMIL-SPEAKERS ARE THE MAJORITY. THE JANATHA VIMUKTI PERAMUNA (JVP) WHICH CARRIED OUT THE 1971 INSURGENCY, WILL ALSO BE CONTESTING SOME SEATS, NOW THAT THE BAN IMPOSED ON ITS POLITICAL ACTIVITIES HAS BEEN LIFTED. SOME OF ITS LEADERS, HOWEVER, ARE STILL IN JAIL.

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R 241015Z MAY 77
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3. WITH THE NSA DISSOLVED, THE NEXT STEP WILL BE THE APPLI-
CATIONS OF NEW PARTIES FOR RECOGNITION FROM THE ELECTION
COMMISSIONER; SUCH RECOGNITION (WHICH REQUIRES A PARTY TO HAVE
HAD FIVE YEARS OF CONTINUOUS POLITICAL ACTIVITY OR TWO M.P.'S
ELECTED ON THE PARTY TICKET) ENTAILS CERTAIN BENEFITS, PRI-
MARILY A REDUCTION IN THE ELECTORAL DEPOSIT AND THE USE OF A
COMMON ELECTORAL SYMBOL FOR ALL THE PARTY'S CANDIDATES.
CURRENTLY RECOGNIZED PARTIES ARE THE UNP, LSSP, CP, SLFP,
MAHAJANA EKSATH PERAMUNA (AN HISTORICAL REMNANT OF MINIMAL
IMPORTANCE), AND THE FEDERAL PARTY AND TAMIL CONGRESS. THE
LAST TWO HAVE MERGED SINCE THE LAST ELECTION INTO THE TULF,
ALTHOUGH SOME CONGRESS DISSENTERS MAY CONTEST SEPARATELY. THE TULF
MAY GAIN RECOGNITION AS A RESULT OF THE P.M.'S LAST-MINUTE
DISSOLUTION OF THE NSA SINCE THE MERGED PARTY WAS INAUGURATED
ON MAY 14, 1972, AND THUS SQUEAKS THROUGH ON THE FIVE YEAR RULE.
NONE OF THE OTHER NEW PARTIES APPEARS TO QUALIFY PRIMA FACIE
FOR RECOGNITION, UNLESS THE JVP (WHICH WAS RECOGNIZED IN 1970)
CAN CONVINCE THE COMMISSIONER TO COUNT TOWARDS THE REQUIRED
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FIVE YEARS ITS PERIOD UNDER PROSCRIPTION.

4. THIS WILL BE THE FIRST ELECTION SINCE 1970 AND THE FIRST
UNDER THE NEW REPUBLICAN CONSTITUTION OF 1972 WHICH SET UP A
UNICAMERAL LEGISLATURE, THE ALL-ELECTED NATIONAL STATE
ASSEMBLY. UNDER THE CONSITITUTION, THE NSA EXERCISES EXE-

CUTIVE AND JUDICIAL, AS WELL AS LEGISLATIVE, AUTHORITY ON BEHALF OF THE PEOPLE. A NEW REDISTRICTING OF 1976 HAS ENLARGED THE NSA TO 168 MEMBERS ELECTED FROM 160 CONSTITUTENCIES (CERTAIN CONSTITUENCIES ELECT MORE THAN ONE MEMBER IN ORDER TO ACCOMMODATE MINORITY GROUPS). THE TOTAL ELECTORATE WILL BE SOME 6.6 MILLION PEOPLE, OF WHOM BASED ON PAST EXPERIENCE, SOME 85 PERCENT WILL GO TO THE POLLS. AROUND 25 PERCENT OF THE VOTERS, AGED 18 TO 25, WILL BE PARTICIPATING IN THEIR FIRST ELECTION AND MUCH SPECULATION HAS SURROUNDED THEIR VOTE -- WHETHER IT WILL GO TO THE YOUTH-ORIENTED EX-INSURGENT GROUPS OR TO THE MORE TRADITIONAL PARTIES. AS MANY AS 90,000 NEWLY-ENFRANCHISED INDIAN TAMILS WILL BE ELIGIBLE FOR THE FIRST TIME, AND WILL VOTE PRIMARILY IN THE PLANTATION AREAS WHERE MOST OF THEM WORK. THEY ARE EXPECTED TO ELECT AN M.P. OF THEIR OWN, THE FIRST ELECTED REPRESENTATIVE FROM THEIR COMMUNITY SINCE MOST WERE DEPRIVED OF SRI LANKA CITIZENSHIP IN 1947.

5. IF PAST ELECTIONS ARE ANY GUIDE, THE CAMPAIGN WILL NOT BE MARRED BY SERIOUS VIOLENCE ALTHOUGH PASSIONS ARE HIGH ON BOTH SIDES, AS INDICATED BY ROCK-THROWING INCIDENTS ON MAY DAY (COLOMBO 1537 NOTAL). WE SERIOUSLY DOUBT THAT THERE WILL BE ANY CONCERTED EFFORT TO RIG THE RESULTS OR THAT SUCH AN EFFORT IF ATTEMPTED WOULD BE SUCCESSFUL. IT IS THE IMMEDIATE POST-ELECTION PERIOD WHICH IS TRADITIONALLY VIOLENT, AND THERE IS LITTLE INDICATION THAT THIS YEAR WILL BE DIFFERENT. THE SLFP CLAIMS, ALTHOUGH THE UNP VEHEMENTLY DENIES IT, THAT J. R. JAYEWARDENE HAS PROMISED TO GIVE THE POLICE A THREE-DAY HOLIDAY IF HE IS ELECTED. THE IMPLICATION IS THAT A NEWLY-POWERFUL UNP WOULD RUN RIOT AND TAKE REVENGE ON THE GRIEVANCES OF THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAST SEVEN YEARS.

6. THE UNP WILL CAMPAIGN ON THE SOMEWHAT-EXAGGERATED PREMISE THAT THE PAST SEVEN YEARS OF MRS. BANDARANAIKE'S RULE HAVE BEEN AN UNMITIGATED DISASTER, WITH POLITICAL CORRUPTION, THE COST OF LIVING, AND UNEMPLOYMENT HAVING RISEN TO UNPRECEDENTED HEIGHTS. THE UNP WILL ALSO ATTACK THE BANDARANAIKE FAMILY, AN EASY TARGET WITH THE PRIME MINISTER'S FOUR BROTHERS, A BROTHER-IN-LAW, AND TWO DAUGHTERS ON THE PUBLIC PAYROLL (AND AN AMBITIOUS SON CONTESTING THE LECTION FOR THE FIRST TIME). THE OPPOSITION IS ALSO BETTING ON THE ELECTORATE BEING FED UP WITH THE INEFFICIENCIES OF STATE CORPORATIONS WHICH, UNDER SLFP REGIMES, HAVE GROWN TO DOMINATE MUCH OF THE CONSUMER ECONOMY. CORRUPTION AND INEFFICIENCY IN THE LOCAL COOPERATIVES/ RATION SHOPS ARE NOTORIOUS. THE UNP HAS BEEN VEHEMENT IN ITS DENUNCIATION OF A NEW RICH CLASS OF GEM MERCHANTS AND "MUDALALIS" (TRADERS) WHOSE FALSHY CARS AND CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION ARE CONSTANT IRRITANTS TO THOSE STRUGGLING WITH SHORTAGES AND

HIGH PRICES. UNP LEADERS HAVE BEEN VAGUE ON THEIR PROGRAMS, PRESUMABLY HOPING THAT THEY CAN RIDE IN ON AN ANTI-SLFP BACKLASH. GENERALLY, THE PARTY IS EMPHASIZING ITS PAST ROLE IN AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT, OFFERING MORE RICE AND WHEAT FLOUR GAIN ON THE RATION BOOK, AND PROMISING A NEW MORALITY IN GOVERNMENT.

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R 241015Z MAY 77
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7. THE SLFP WILL POINT TO ITS ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE PAST SEVEN YEARS, INCLUDING LAND REFORM, NATIONALIZATION OF THE PLANTATION SECTOR, IRRIGATION DEVELOPMENT, AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A NEW CONSTITUTION. THE PARTY WILL ARGUE THAT IT NEEDS TIME TO CONSOLIDATE ITS ACHIEVEMENTS WHICH ARE NOW BEGINNING TO BEAR FRUIT (AS WITNESS THIS YEAR'S BUMPER HARVEST). THE SLFP HAS ALSO NOT BEEN AVERSE TO USING THE POWERS OF INCUMBENCY TO ATTRACT VOTES THROUGH ECONOMIC MANIPULATION. THE LAST SIX MONTHS HAVE SEEN LOWERED PRICES THANKS TO A 20 PERCENT REVALUATION OF THE RUPEE, PATRONAGE APPOINTMENTS IN THE EDUCATION MINISTRY AND OTHER DEPARTMENTS (REF D), AND MASSIVE GOVERNMENT IMPORTS OF CONSUMER GOODS. HOWEVER, THE IMPACT OF THE LAST OF THESE ACTIONS WAS LESSENED BECAUSE IT SERVED TO POINT UP THE CORRUPTION OF THE DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM, I.E. INSTEAD OF BEING SOLD IN GOVERNMENT FAIR PRICE SHOPS, MOST CONSUMER GOODS WERE QUICKLY SIPHONED OFF TO A THRIVING AND EXPENSIVE BLACK MARKET. BUT PERHAPS THE SLFP'S MOST POTENT

ISSUE IS LEADERSHIP -- THE PRIME MINISTER IS A PROVEN LEADER,
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AND WIDELY RESPECTED THROUGHOUT MOST OF THE COUNTRY, TWO
ADVANTAGES SHE HAS OVER J. R. JAYEWARDENE, TO WHOM THE
ADJECTIVE "CHARISMA" COULD NEVER BE APPLIED.

8. FOREIGN POLICY IS NOT LIKELY TO BE AN ISSUE IN THE CAMPAIGN
ALTHOUGH THE PRIME MINISTER NO DOUBT HOPES TO DERIVE SOME
POLITICAL CAPITAL FROM HER SUCCESSFUL HOSTING OF THE AUGUST
1976 NON-ALIGNED SUMMIT CONFERENCE AND HER PROMINENT ROLE
SINCE THEN AS LEADER OF THE MOVEMENT. THE UNP PLEDGES AN
INDEPENDENT, ANTI-IMPERIALIST AND NON-ALIGNED FOREIGN POLICY
COMMITTED TO THE SOLIDARITY OF THE THIRD WORLD - NOTHING THE
SLFP COULD DISAGREE WITH. IT IS A WIDELY-HELD BELIEF THAT THE
UNP IS SOMEWHAT MORE ORIENTED TO THE WEST AND TO THE U.S. THAN
IS THE MAINSTREAM OF THE SLFP. UNP LEADERS HAVE IN THE PAST
SPOKEN OF THEIR EXPECTATION OF BEING ABLE TO GET INCREASED
AID FROM THE U.S.

9. DESPITE CONFIDENT PREDICTIONS BY BOTH SLFP AND UNP
POLITICIANS THAT THEIR PARTY WILL WIN AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY,
SOME NEUTRAL OBSERVERS SEE AS MORE LIKELY A CLOSE OUTCOME
WITH BOTH PARTIES IN A MINORITY POSITION. IN SUCH A CASE,
BOTH OF THE INDEPENDENT GROUPS -- THE TAMILS AND THE LEFTISTS
-- WILL BE WELL-SITUATED FOR POST-ELECTION BARGAINING.
(SOME HAVE SUGGESTED THAT THE UNUSUALLY LONG FIVE WEEK PERIOD
BETWEEN ELECTIONS AND THE CONVENING OF THE NEW ASSEMBLY IS
DESIGNED FOR JUST SUCH HORSETRADING.) THE TULF WITH ITS 20-
SOME SEATS WILL HAVE A LONG LIST OF DEMANDS -- FOR REGIONAL
AUTONOMY, TAMIL LANGUAGE CONCESSIONS, ETC., -- TO PRESENT TO
EITHER PARTY SEEKING THEIR SUPPORT FOR A COALITION GOVERN-
MENT. THE SOCIALIST UNITED FRONT MAY NOT BE SO UNITED ON
NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE SLFP (AN SUF DEAL WITH THE UNP IS VIRTUALLY
IMPOSSIBLE TO ENVISION). WHILE THE COMMUNIST PARTY IS MORE
LIKELY TO BE CONTENT TO COMPROMISE ON AN IDEOLOGICALLY RADICAL
"COMMON PROGRAM", THE LSSP MAY HAVE MORE DIVISIVE DEMANDS --
INCLUDING MRS. BANDARANAIKE'S RESIGNATION FROM THE PRIME
MINISTERSHIP, PERHAPS COUPLED WITH HER PROMOTION TO THE
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FIREHEAD PRESIDENCY. IF SUCH A HARDLINE RESULTS IN A STATE-
MATE AND THERE IS NO PROSPECT IN VIEW OF A MAJORITY GOVERNMENT
CENTERED AROUND EITHER THE SLFP OR THE UNP, A NOT IMPOSSIBLE
SCENARIO IS A HASTY REALIGNMENT OF THE MAJOR PARTIES. EITHER
THE SLFP AND THE UNP COULD FORM A JOINT NATIONAL GOVERNMENT WITH

THE DISAFFECTED LEFT WING OF THE SLFP DROPPING AWAY TO THE SUF
OR, MORE LIKELY, SOME RIGHT-WING ELEMENTS OF THE SLFP COULD
BREAK OFF FROM THE PARTY AND SIGN UP FOR CABINET POSTS WITH
A UNP GOVERNMENT. OR FINALLY, AS IN 1960, A WEAL COALITION
MIGHT BE FORMED WHICH WOULD LAST ONLY A FEW MONTHS, LEADING
TO FURTHER ELECTIONS.

10. SEPTELS WILL FOCUS ON THE PLANS AND PROSPECTS OF THE UNP
AND SLFP.
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